

# Millions for Prisoners Human Rights March NO SHACKLES

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Vol 1.11

## Letter from the Editor

Brothers and Sisters,

This is the last month before our march so this edition of NoShackles lists some sister marches that will be taking place throughout the country in solidarity with the Millions for Prisoners march in Washington D.C. on August 19<sup>th</sup>.

I look forward to meeting those of you who will be able to attend the march and rally located in Washington D.C. I will be speaking during the rally, sharing poetry and words from some of my incarcerated comrades. If you are able to attend one of the events or demonstrations on August 19<sup>th</sup>, do not hesitate to contact your local representative for details and join us. You can find your local rep through our Facebook page. These events are about showing support for those who are unable to attend themselves. We cannot allow our government to continue to think that the incarcerated population is dispensable or unaccounted for, Black August is for us to show that we are not standby witnesses, but consistently watching and heavily active.

If you or someone you know is unable to attend the march for reasons ranging from incarceration to disability, please join us in Washington D.C. online by using the virtual march link. We want to stand with everyone in solidarity with the prison abolitionist movement. For all those joining us in this movement JLS has outlined specific actions to take including refraining from purchasing all prison products and wearing a black armband on the left wrist. These are actions I want to highlight now that Black August, the month of righteous rebellion, is quickly approaching. If you have not yet made travel or demonstration arrangements for the march, now is the time to do so.

In solidarity,  
Amani Sawari (@SawariMi)



## Inside this Issue:

- Letter from the Editor (p.1)
- It's Time to Overhaul America's Broken Probation and Parole Systems (p.2)
- Ability to Vote Compromised for Thousands Behind Bars in Cook County (p. 4)
- '13<sup>th</sup>' and the culture of surplus punishment (p.9)
- Organized Sister Marches in Solidarity (p.13)
- Virtual Marches (p.14)
- Millions for Prisoners March Update (p.15)
- Getting Involved (p.15)
- Reader Submission Info (p.16)

*The 13th Amendment to the Constitution declared that "Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction."*



iamWE Prison Advocacy Network

# It's Time to Overhaul America's Broken Probation and Parole Systems

By Topeka K. Sam | Open Society Foundations | [www.opensocietyfoundations.org](http://www.opensocietyfoundations.org)

July 13, 2017



A probation officer helps a new arrival at juvenile probation camp in Santa Clarita, California, on November 3, 2010. Photo credit: © Bethany Mollenkof/LA Times/G

I was released from prison two years and two months ago. Since then, I have been working to improve the lives of formerly incarcerated women and men.

I've received fellowships from Beyond the Bars and the Open Society Foundations, and was named a Justice in Education Scholar at Columbia University. I founded the Ladies of Hope Ministries, which helps women and girls transition from prison back into society through education, entrepreneurship, and advocacy. I am establishing Hope House, a re-entry housing development for women and girls. As a founding member and national organizer of the National Council for Incarcerated and Formerly Incarcerated Women and Girls, I have crisscrossed the country organizing council chapters and creating symposiums at law schools nationwide.

Yet those who monitor my activities as part of my sentence still view me with suspicion and disdain. "Your constant travel is reminiscent of a drug dealer, Ms. Sam," my probation officer's supervisor said to me recently. I looked her in the eye and tried to resist feeling devalued, shamed, stigmatized, angry, and triggered. Despite the work I've done—work which has changed my life and helped me change the lives of others—the comment cut me to the core.

At that moment, I was reminded that probation is just another form of incarceration.

July 16 marks the beginning of the American Probation & Parole Association's Pretrial, Probation, and Parole Supervision Week, which is intended to "celebrate the success of the community corrections/supervision professionals who make our country safer," in the words of the association's website. "These individuals help change lives of men/women and boys/girls, as well as enhance the quality of life in our communities."



I am one of the 4.7 million people who live under the daily control of a probation supervisor or a parole officer. And I will not be celebrating next week. I spent three years in federal prison, six months in federal community custody at a halfway house, and the last two years and counting under federal supervised release. I know what it is to be policed and surveilled. I know what it's like to have your parents questioned about your whereabouts, to have their home invaded, all while your probation officer knows you are at work.

In theory, probation (supervised time in lieu of incarceration) and parole (early release from incarceration under supervision) are important elements in the drive for decarceration. However, the system has also created an additional layer of law enforcement control, intrusion, and surveillance—especially in communities of color, which are heavily policed already.

The system needs an overhaul. People who are monitored must be treated with human dignity. Our rights are often denied because of policies, procedures, and rules that are seldom explained and often administered arbitrarily. When we have been treated unfairly, there is no clear process to register grievances or appeal decisions that affect every aspect of our lives, including our very freedom.

Parole and probation officers could constructively help to, as the association put it, “enhance the quality of life” in my community of Harlem. To do this, the Bureau of Prisons, as well as city, county, and state probation and parole agencies, must increase accountability by fully training the people who serve in these powerful positions and by creating mechanisms to hold them responsible for their decisions. Those of us in the system must be able to exercise our rights without fear of reprisal and increased surveillance.

One counterproductive and punitive condition of release prohibits people under probation, parole, or supervised release from interacting with anyone who has a felony conviction without first securing approval. In practical terms, this means somebody leaving prison cannot reunite with their spouse, relatives, or other loved ones if any of those people had a felony conviction in their past—even if it happened years ago. This tears families apart, cutting people off from love and support, and makes the challenges of coming home even more difficult.

When supervisors and administrators stop using policies like this as a tool of control and begin explaining the policies and rules of probation and parole to the women and men whose lives they monitor, I'll join the celebration of Pretrial, Parole, and Supervision Week. Until then, I will continue working with the formerly incarcerated women who are my mentors and the millions of my sisters and brothers who live under state control so we can build better lives and better communities.



# Ability to Vote Compromised for Thousands Behind Bars in Cook County

By La Risa Lynch | New America Media | <http://newamericamedia.org/>

July 10, 2017



The gym could pass for any Election Day polling place. Two volunteer election judges hurriedly sorted dozens of sealed manila envelopes containing ballots for last April's suburban Cook County municipal elections. One of the judges propped two white plastic shields on top of a long metal table, creating a makeshift voting booth.

Minutes later a Cook County Jail guard ushered in the first voters—two female inmates dressed in pink jumpsuits.

On March 28, for the first time in nearly a decade, eligible inmates were allowed to vote in person and submit their ballots to election officials rather than mail them in. Cook County Jail is among a few places in the nation that permits in-person voter registration and voting. The county clerk's office and volunteers worked with jail officials to set up polling places—in the gym for women, in a chapel for men in maximum security.

Michelle Mbekeani-Wiley, of the Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law, a social and economic justice organization, spearheaded the effort. Since last year she and a band of volunteers have visited the jail every weekend to do voter education and register inmates awaiting trial.

"People that are currently detained are impacted by those very same policies that our elected officials are making critical decisions on," said Mbekeani-Wiley, explaining why inmates should be able to vote. "They should be part of that process."

In Illinois, inmates awaiting trial have the right to vote, but the state law is vague and the ability to vote may depend on having a supportive jail administrator and election authority official who allow voter education drives behind bars. There is no way to track whether eligible inmates are being denied access to the vote.

Millions of African-Americans cannot vote because they are imprisoned for committing felonies, as Michelle Alexander chronicles in her book "The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Color



Blindness.” But thousands of people are in jails across the country, and a majority can still vote. In 2015, 700,000 people were in the nation’s jails, according to the U.S. Justice Department’s Bureau of Justice Statistics. Of those, at least 63 percent were still eligible to vote, say prison reform experts. These inmates are often poor blacks and Latinos who cannot afford bail, creating what activists say is two classes of voters.

In the last general election, civil rights groups blasted voter identification laws which disproportionately disenfranchise minority voters, but ignored the jail population, an equally important group, said Marc Mauer, executive director of the Washington, D.C., based The Sentencing Project, which advocates for sentencing reform.

“It is not only the system,” he said. “I think the advocacy community needs to pick up on this issue as well.”

### **Limited access to the ballot**

Before volunteer election judges and poll watchers fanned out among Cook County Jail’s 10 divisions in March, Mbekeani-Wiley sat in an office sorting blue bags containing ballots. Mbekeani-Wiley’s curiosity about voting access in jails brought her to this moment.

“When you engage face-to-face with people,” she said, “I think they’re more likely to register to vote than getting a packet in the mail.”

Last year, Mbekeani-Wiley began going inside the jail with volunteers from various groups to register eligible voters. By the time the 2016 general election rolled around, they had registered 1,000 new voters at the jail.

In the 2016 general election, nearly 1,200 ballots came from Cook County Jail, whose population hovers around 7,000 and is 74 percent black.

Mbekeani-Wiley’s efforts are not the first. The civil rights organization Operation Rainbow/PUSH has gone inside the jail since 1974 when a Supreme Court decision found it unconstitutional for states to deny access to the ballot for people in jail awaiting trial. The ruling left it to the states and election administrators to determine how inmates could vote.

Jurors are selected from voter rolls, which adds to the importance of voter registration in communities of color, said the Rev. Janette Wilson, senior advisor to the Rev. Jesse Jackson Sr., the organization’s founder. She said blacks are woefully absent from the jury pool, which can affect the outcome of a trial. Black men, Wilson added, are more adversely affected by the criminal justice system. On a recent visit, Wilson said Jackson asked inmates if they would serve on the jury in the trial of a Chicago police officer accused of shooting teenager Laquan McDonald in 2014; all said yes.

Wilson said, “So part of the push was to get blacks to see the links between voter registration and jury selection.”

Cook County Clerk David Orr, who oversees county elections, said in a statement to The Chicago Reporter: “I believe everybody entitled to vote should be able to vote. ... It’s a matter of human dignity and how society chooses to treat those in jail.”



Orr's office will look at the resources devoted to in-person voting before deciding whether to do it again.

Cara Smith, Sheriff Tom Dart's chief policy officer, said the county jail has had an extensive absentee voting process for quite some time. The sheriff's office sends inmates' names to the clerk's office, which determines who is registered to vote and who is eligible to vote. Then officials send voting packets to the inmates. But in-person voting represents "the next evolution to that commitment," she said.

"To the extent we can create these opportunities that they have on the street while they are in custody, we are going to continue to do so."

### **Vague law creates disparities between jails**

In 2005 Illinois amended a law that disqualified people in jail from voting. But legal experts say the law is ambiguous and could lead to voter disenfranchisement because it doesn't spell out procedures for inmates to register and vote. And the law doesn't require election authorities to report vote totals from the state's jails. As a result, only 23 of 109 election authorities in Illinois reported the votes from the 2016 general election, according to records from the Illinois Board of Election.

Interviews with election and jail officials in Cook, Will, Kankakee, Kane, St. Clair and Lake counties, which have among the largest combined black and Latino populations in the state, reveal disparities in jail voting practices. Some election officials work closely with jails, like the Lake County Clerk's office. The clerk's office emails registration forms and mail-in ballot applications to jail officials, who distribute them to inmates. Near the election, inmates can cast their ballots in person.

Other election officials pass the duty to volunteer deputy registrars who often are not affiliated with the election authority and may not have access to the jails. In most cases, the onus is on inmates to alert jail or election officials that they want to register or vote. In Will County, election officials have no process to go inside the local jail to register inmates and have never been asked to do so.

The disparities in voting procedures in the state's jails are problematic for the nonprofit Chicago Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights. Ami Gandhi, director of voting rights and civic empowerment for the group, said the interpretation and application of the law can vary widely because it is so vague.

"The onus is on the voter and advocates to figure out the lay of the land, where voter access is and is not happening and how to go about making it more uniform and fair," Gandhi said, adding that there is also little outreach to inmates about their voting rights.

If inmates don't know their rights, she said, they're less likely to exercise them. Gandhi cited the example of ex-offenders who are routinely told by parole or probation officers that they do not have the right to vote, which is incorrect.

Unlike officials in Cook, a lot of other Illinois county election officials haven't considered in-person voting or registration. The reasons can run the gamut, said The Sentencing Project's Mauer. Logistics and staffing for registering inmates, setting up polling places and even high turnover in the jail population are valid concerns, he said. Most jail officials would say they are not preventing inmates from voting, "but in most cases it hasn't occurred to them that this is something that they should be considering in their local jails."



## Inmate voting rights hinge on volunteers

Nationally, grass-roots voter education and registration efforts targeting inmates have met with mixed results.

Philadelphia has farmed out voting to an outside agency for 15 years. There have been problems with the contractors, including not following election procedures.

In Los Angeles County, which has the biggest jail system in the world, the group A New Way of Life has gone inside the jails to register inmates since former President Barack Obama ran for re-election in 2012. But in the last presidential election the group met with resistance from some jail officials. When the group's request to register voters in the county's eight jails went unanswered, Susan Burton, the group's founder, filed an intent to sue in October in the Los Angeles Superior Court.

"Sometimes we get the cooperation of the sheriffs. Sometimes we don't," said Burton, whose nonprofit provides supportive and re-entry services for formerly incarcerated women.

"We were communicating with them and they were not being responsive," said Burton, who cycled in and out of prison for nearly two decades before she started the organization.

### Voting Behind Bars

Under Illinois law, people awaiting trial in jail are eligible to vote. But if you've been convicted of a crime and incarcerated, you cannot vote. The law applies to people serving time for misdemeanors in local jails and for felonies in prisons.

Once you are released from prison or jail, you regain the right to vote—that includes people who are on parole or probation.

Source: The Chicago Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights; Cook County Clerk's Office

The two-month delay between filing the lawsuit and the deadline to register voters left members with only five days to register inmates. There was some urgency to get inside the jails because of [a new law](#) allowing people serving minor felony convictions in California county jails access to the ballot box.

The group registered 450 inmates. The average daily population of the Los Angeles County jail is about 18,000.

"So when you talk about voter suppression, this is just a perfect case of it," said Burton. "For African Americans who are incarcerated at an elevated rate from the rest of the populace, it's like the wins of the civil rights movement are lost on the backs of the criminal justice system."

In Washington, D.C., prison reform activist Charlie Sullivan galvanized support to pass a law in 2009 requiring the district's jails to register inmates when they are admitted. The effort grew out of his 17 years going inside the

jails to register inmates. Sullivan, co-founder of [CURE National](#), or Citizens United for Rehabilitation of Errants, believes inmates' right to vote should not hinge on volunteers, but should lay with D.C.'s board



of elections and the jails.

“It’s very important that it becomes part of the system,” he said. “The department of corrections must have someone ready to explain the voting process to someone processed into the jail rather than wait for [volunteers] to do it.”

Sullivan traces his interest in voting rights and prison reform to the days following the 1971 Attica prison uprising in New York State. The inmates had rioted over conditions at the facility.

“Always in the back of my mind is people who are not even convicted who are sitting in jail because they can’t afford bond to get out and they are eligible to vote,” said the former priest. He likened denying inmates’ access to the ballot to a poll tax based on ability to pay bond.

“So we have two classes of voters,” he said.

Getting election and jail officials to let inmates register and vote was a tough sell, he said. He recalled when a high-risk inmate shackled at his waist and surrounded by guards was brought into an area in the D.C. jail to vote.

“They took all those things [off] and he sat down at the table and voted. ... It brought tears to my eyes,” Sullivan said. “He has not been found guilty of anything, and he was eligible to vote.”

### **Statewide action needed**

Voting rights advocates in Illinois would like for jails and prisons to be sites for automatic voter registration. Prisoners would be registered upon release. The idea is similar to the D.C. law and taps into the state’s recently passed automatic voter registration law, which allows people to register at certain Illinois agencies. The measure awaits Gov. Bruce Rauner’s signature.

The Illinois Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, which held public hearings on the issue in the spring, is developing recommendations to improve voter access in the state, including for pretrial detainees.

Gandhi says incarcerated voters should have the same options to vote as other citizens. State law gives Illinois residents access to online and same-day voter registration, as well as early voting. In general, jail inmates can only vote by mail, which Gandhi said is a limited way to engage in the political process. The solution, she said, is to have voting machines in jail like a regular polling station.

Doing so will require more collaboration between voting rights advocates, jail officials and election authorities, she said. Gandhi acknowledges Cook County’s efforts to allow inmates to register and vote in person, but she said there needs to be statewide action to end disenfranchisement.

“It’s a step in the right direction,” Gandhi said, “and there is even more progress that is necessary to fully respect the rights of voters in pretrial detention.”

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## ‘13<sup>th</sup>’ and the culture of surplus punishment

By Victor Walls | Bayview National Black Newspaper | <http://sfbayview.com/>  
July 13, 2017



Michelle Alexander, author of the game-changing book, “The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness,” plays a major role in “13th.”

Ava DuVernay undertook the documentary “13<sup>th</sup>” in order to explore and bring attention to the Prison Industrial Complex.<sup>[1]</sup> The film’s title refers to the 1865 amendment to the U.S. Constitution, in which slavery was abolished “except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted.” The story told by “13<sup>th</sup>” thus goes back to the early chain-gangs of Black prisoners – men arrested for petty offenses under the post-Civil War Black Codes who were then contracted out to perform labor that they had previously performed as privately-owned slaves. Now they were under state control, but they still worked for no pay.

Images of 19th-century chain-gangs appear at both the beginning and the end of the film. In between, we are presented with archival clips and commentary reflecting the history of Black oppression in the United States from the time of the 13th Amendment right up to the present. What the film most directly brings out is the deadly continuity of the oppressive practices – ranging from disenfranchisement to lynchings to police attacks – across superficially distinct historical periods.

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What it encourages us to reflect on, beyond this, is the degree to which the structures of oppression have effects that go far beyond their immediate victims. This global impact of the Prison Industrial Complex is suggested in the clip that we see from a 1980 speech by right-wing strategist Paul Weyrich, where he articulates in six words what has remained to this day a central though rarely acknowledged tactic of the system of domination: “I don’t want everybody to vote.”<sup>[2]</sup>

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“13<sup>th</sup>” is certainly a film that everyone should see – especially that whole vast sector of the U.S. population which, whether through prejudice or inertia or media-fostered ignorance, self-righteously refuses to look at anything that might dislodge its fiercely worn ideological blinders. With racist assertions no longer officially acceptable in the U.S., we all need to be reminded – as we are by “13<sup>th</sup>” – of the ways in which racist practice continues to permeate political life. An especially effective passage in the film is where it cuts back and forth between scenes of aggression at a 2016 Trump campaign rally –



stoked by the future president himself – and scenes from the 1950s of violence inflicted by police and vigilantes against Black people.

The whole history persuasively frames the present-day embodiment of the U.S.’s “peculiar institution,” namely mass incarceration, which entombs one in three Black men at some point in their lives.<sup>[3]</sup> Ironically, however, what the film does not take up at all is the literal perpetuation of slavery in today’s prison system. In fact, the demand to repeal the 13th Amendment’s “exception clause” – to amend the amendment – is at the core of a current nationwide movement of prisoners against being forced to work for next to nothing or, in the case of Texas, nothing at all.<sup>[4]</sup>

Also not highlighted in the film is the systematic application of surplus punishment, including physical abuse, medical neglect and psychological torture. Although we are shown the horrendous treatment of Kalief Browder – a youth who was falsely charged and never tried – on NYC’s Rikers Island, we are not told about the nationwide web of “supermax” facilities or about the widespread use of sensory deprivation and prolonged solitary confinement. We shall come back to this.

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The single word that summarizes the film’s narrative is criminalization. Criminalization serves to confer legitimacy on all the inequities and indignities that the system perpetrates on people of color. The practices are then rationalized as being aimed not against a particular ethnicity but rather against a category of persons – implicitly unworthy – who have rejected the norms of civilized society. The suffering endured by such “criminals” is presumed to flow directly from their own misdeeds and therefore not to merit any concern on the part of “law-abiding” citizens.

The stereotyping of prisoners as criminals – or “offenders,” in the official lingo – makes it possible for many of us to unthinkingly accept the preposterous idea that, within the space of a generation, there could have occurred a sudden quintupling of an identifiable character-type within a given society – to wit, a surge of “criminals” in the United States that suddenly arose starting in the mid-1970s. In fact, the ballooning of the U.S. prison population reflects key measures taken by the government to address a systemic crisis.

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Political protest was at a peak in 1969 when Richard Nixon became president. The Black Panther Party (BPP) was rapidly expanding, and was tagged by the FBI as the “greatest threat to national security.” Eager to suppress the Black revolt but no longer able to target people on the basis of “race,” Nixon instead invoked the specter of crime.

State agencies, acting either directly or through surrogates, could assassinate the most inspirational Black leaders – Malcolm X, Martin Luther King Jr. and Chicago BPP leader Fred Hampton – and could frame and lock up many others, but this was not enough to assure pacification of their popular base. Here is where the “war on drugs” came in. It subjected street transactions to the same level of surveillance and manipulation as had previously been deployed against revolutionary organizations like the BPP.<sup>[5]</sup>

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Legislation passed under Presidents Reagan, Bush I and Clinton lengthened sentences for even minor drug-related offenses and also made it harder for criminal defendants to appeal from state to federal courts. At the same time, the lure of the illegal drug trade was augmented as neoliberal economic policies – including corporate globalization, deindustrialization and the attack on welfare – cut into working-class job opportunities and incomes. From the standpoint of capital’s need for a labor force, there were more



hands available than necessary. Welfare had to be undercut because it made the unemployed less vulnerable.

With well-paying jobs gone, with welfare gutted and with the resultant volatile populations, a higher level of control was seen as necessary. Hence the disproportionate presence of police in poor neighborhoods, especially those whose inhabitants share a common culture and therefore a potential for effective resistance. Hence also the over-representation of those communities in the prisons, whose primary function is to warehouse what from a capitalist perspective is surplus population.

In this general structure of control, prisons stand at the apex. The “offender” label is thrown into question, however, by the overwhelming preponderance of plea-bargaining – as opposed to conviction at trial – in determining prison sentences. Bronx Democrat Charles Rangel, interviewed in “13th,” says that plea bargains determine the outcome in 97 percent of criminal cases. This refers to the federal level, but state practices run in the same range.<sup>[6]</sup>

Yet even a relatively short prison term amounts to many more years of punishment. This is because of laws – or policies of private corporate entities – that are unrelated to the legal sentence for a given offense. Ex-prisoners are thus subject to being denied employment opportunities, student loans, food stamps, access to public housing and, crucially, the right to vote. Many of these hardships vary by state or locality, but the disenfranchisement is estimated to extend nationally to about 6 million potential voters, overwhelmingly people of color.

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This aspect of surplus punishment is noted in “13th.” Another aspect that should not be forgotten is the impact on prisoners’ households, whose members are also punished both materially and psychologically by the incarceration of their loved ones. But the most glaring expression of surplus punishment is the abuse of the prisoners themselves. Of course, the incidence and the severity of such abuse varies by state, by institution and with immediate contingencies. But there is an enabling ideology and a corresponding staff culture which gives rise to common and widespread practices.

There is moreover a continuum between these practices and the harder-to-conceal practices of the police, operating in neighborhoods whose populations they seek to keep in line. Guards and police are alike in functioning as occupation forces and have no accountability to those whose lives they oversee. Where stop-and-frisk laws are in effect, police have the same arbitrary power as prison guards. But even without such laws, there are countless petty rules that can serve as pretexts for detaining someone, and once the detention has been made, the cop is in control, and for a person of color to challenge that control is to run a mortal risk.<sup>[7]</sup>

The point here is that the very mindset that gives police the license to kill gratuitously – i.e., even when they are clearly in no danger – also tells prison officials that they are entitled to inflict both physical and psychological torture on the people in their custody. At the higher levels of power, this is rationalized in terms of what is allegedly required for the sake of maintaining order; at the lower levels of implementation, i.e., in the conduct of prison guards, it takes the more direct form of finding satisfaction in subjugating those over whom they have been given total control.<sup>[8]</sup>

**Guards and police are alike in functioning as occupation forces and have no accountability to those whose lives they oversee.**

Accounts of such behavior occasionally penetrate media indifference, as in the case of a mentally ill prisoner in Florida who in 2012 was scalded to death – locked for two hours in a steaming shower by guards who then ignored his cries.<sup>[9]</sup> Cases of beatings, of deliberate medical neglect and of destruction of prisoners’ property – in various states – are too numerous to itemize.<sup>[10]</sup> Equally widespread is the practice



of long-term solitary confinement, imposed especially on organizers. Forty-four states have supermax prisons, in which solitary confinement is the norm.<sup>[11]</sup>

New repressive practices are continuously introduced. Although they are not all equally severe, they point in a consistent direction. In one New York State prison, an additional wall was put up a few years ago, just outside the window of the visiting room, exclusively in order to block one's view of the hills in the distance. In Virginia, the visiting system was recently reorganized so that you are no longer put on a visiting list by each prisoner you might visit, but you instead have to apply for visiting status on the system-wide website, which, except in the case of family-members, only allows you to visit one prisoner in the state.

In many local jails, it is now becoming common to allow visits only via video – an arrangement that institutions find attractive because it saves staff time while also providing, like the notorious prison-phone system, an opportunity to extort payment from visitors – most of whom, like their brothers and sisters behind the walls, come from poverty.<sup>[12]</sup> Common to all such steps is the further isolation of prisoners from normal life, whether in the form of contact with family and friends or in the form simply of visual variety in one's surroundings.

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While the topic of mass incarceration is ably introduced by “13th,” we begin to see the full impact of the phenomenon only when we recognize that the people it ensnares are not just locked up for a certain period of time; they are continuously subjected to additional punishment, which not only makes their confinement more painful, but also extends itself, for those who are fortunate enough to be released, far into the rest of their lives.

Behind this whole constellation of practices lies a self-perpetuating culture of mistrust. The culture in question is not, of course, embraced by everyone, but it is reinforced at the highest levels. It is integrally tied to the extreme social inequality that has arisen in the U.S. And it is expressed on the global stage by the argument that in order for “us” – a deliberately unspecified entity – to be secure in the world, “we” must have a bigger arsenal of weapons than all the other military powers combined. This perversion of the concept of security – lumping popular needs with capitalist interests – appears consistently whether we’re examining the worldwide network of U.S. military bases or the domestic mechanisms through which the potentially most rebellious sectors of the population are kept under control.

The priority given to exercising control reflects an underlying antagonism of interests. The overgrowth of the U.S. penal system, in turn, reflects the failure of the country's political structures to restrain even the most draconian of ruling-class impositions. The resulting prison climate of suspicion, tension and periodic outbursts should be assessed in the light of an alternative model.

The segment on Norwegian prisons in Michael Moore's 2015 documentary, “Where to Invade Next,” offers both the evidence and the argument for an approach which says that confinement is punishment enough, and that beyond that, the focus should be on rehabilitation. To anyone who thinks that this approach is unrealistic, the only possible reply is: This shows how deeply the culture of domination has entrenched itself in our society.

[11] She says this to Oprah Winfrey in an interview that accompanies the film.

[12] The racial dimension of voter-suppression is expertly illuminated by journalist Greg Palast. See his 2016 book and DVD, “The Best Democracy Money Can Buy,” <http://www.gregpalast.com/>.

[13] Report of The Sentencing Project to the United Nations Human Rights Committee Regarding Racial Disparities in the United States Criminal Justice System, August 2013, <http://sentencingproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Race-and-Justice-Shadow-Report-ICCPR.pdf>, p. 1.



[4] See Alice Speri, “The Largest Prison Strike in U.S. History Enters Its Second Week,” <https://theintercept.com/2016/09/16/the-largest-prison-strike-in-u-s-history-enters-its-second-week/>. Abolition of prison slavery is a central demand of the “millions4prisoners” march planned for Aug. 19, 2017.

[5] Michelle Alexander, who is extensively interviewed in “13th,” describes how Nixon hatched the war on drugs, in “The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness” (New York: New Press, 2012), pp. 40ff. The political agenda underlying the drug war is discussed in Mumia Abu-Jamal and Johanna Fernández, eds., “The Roots of Mass Incarceration: Locking up Black Dissidents and Punishing the Poor,” special issue of *Socialism and Democracy* (November 2014), <http://sdonline.org/back-issues/#66>.

[6] Jed S. Rakoff, “Why Innocent People Plead Guilty,” *New York Review of Books*, Nov. 20, 2014, <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2014/11/20/why-innocent-people-plead-guilty/>.

[7] Steve Martinot, “Probing the Epidemic of Police Murders,” *Socialism and Democracy* (March 2013), <http://sdonline.org/back-issues/#61/>.

[8] See Kevin “Rashid” Johnson, “The Abuse Goes On: The Corrupting Dynamics of Power in a Texas Prison” (2017), <http://rashidmod.com/?p=2374>. Regarding the assumption that extreme methods must be used to maintain order, see the extraordinary memoir by Jamie Bissonette et al., “When the Prisoners Ran Walpole” (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2008).

[9] Report in *Miami Herald*, June 25, 2014, <http://www.miamiherald.com/news/local/community/miami-dade/article1972693.html>. An official investigation concluded in 2017 that no charges should be brought against the responsible officers, <https://diy.rootsaction.org/petitions/darren-rainey-was-tortured-and-killed-by-prison-guards-at-dade-correctional-institution-in-florida>.

[10] For reports by Kevin “Rashid” Johnson, see [http://rashidmod.com/?page\\_id=166](http://rashidmod.com/?page_id=166). For reports by Keith “Malik” Washington, a leader of the anti-slavery drive, see <http://sfbayview.com/?s=keith+malik+washington>.

[11] Albert Woodfox, recently released from Angola Prison in Louisiana, was held in solitary for 43-plus years. Kevin “Rashid” Johnson has been in solitary, in three different state systems, for most of his 25-plus years of incarceration. For a brief overview of the practice, which routinely victimizes over 80,000 prisoners in the U.S., see <http://solitarywatch.com/facts/faq/>.

[12] National Public Radio report (2016), <http://www.npr.org/2016/12/05/504458311/video-calls-replace-in-person-visits-in-some-jails>.

*Victor Wallis is the managing editor of Socialism and Democracy (<http://sdonline.org>). He teaches political science and is the author of many articles on ecology and Left politics. He can be reached at 411A Highland Ave. #321, Somerville MA 02144 or [zendive@aol.com](mailto:zendive@aol.com). This article will appear later this year, with minor revisions, in the online media journal Jump Cut (<http://ejumpcut.org/>).*

## Organized Sister Marches in Solidarity

### Main March:

LOCATION: Lafayette Square, Washington, D.C.  
 TIME: 11:30PM – 5:00PM  
 ORGANIZER(S): iamWE Prison Advocacy Network

### Sister Marches:

LOCATION: Asheville, North Carolina  
 TIME: 11:30 AM  
 ORGANIZER(S): Brit L. Castañeda, Jake Swett & Yeye Siju Osunyemi

March on Montgomery  
 LOCATION: Alabama State Capitol Tours in Montgomery, Alabama  
 TIME: 12:00PM – 6:00PM  
 ORGANIZER(S): Unheard Voices OTCJ



LOCATION: Franklin CI in Carrabelle, Florida  
TIME: 1:00PM – 4:00PM  
ORGANIZER(S): Campaign to Fight Toxic Prisons

LOCATION: San Jose, California  
TIME: 12:00PM – 5:00PM  
ORGANIZER(S): California Prison Focus

### Social Media:

Millions for Prisoners uses Social Media as a tool for connecting activists, advocates, prisoners, ex-prisoners, their family and friends. Here's where you can find our official pages:

Twitter @milli4prisoners

Facebook @ Millions for Prisoners March on Washington

Circulate the following hashtags as you publicize your events so that we can find each other and spread awareness on social media:

- #Abolishthe13th
- #EndPrisonSlavery
- #RiseUp
- #DCProtests
- #BlackAugust
- #M4P
- #M4P(your city) ex. #M4PSeattle



## Virtual March

This virtual march is primarily for those who identify as prisoners and or disabled to upload (or send) posts, as the mission of this virtual march is to highlight the intersection between incarceration and disability. For example, we acknowledge many forms of imprisonment (e.g. disabled people may be incarcerated in prisons, nursing homes, psychiatric facilities etc.) and also that the school-to-prison pipeline flows right through special education services. However, we also welcome stories from family members and especially children of those affected.

Link to join:

<http://millionsforprisonersvm.com/index.php/join-the-virtual-march/>



# Millions for Prisoners March

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## Mission Statement

WE SEEK TO UNITE ACTIVISTS, ADVOCATES, PRISONERS, EX-PRISONERS, THEIR FAMILY AND FRIENDS, AS WELL AS ALL OTHERS COMMITTED TO THE FIGHT TO DRASTICALLY REDUCE OR ELIMINATE PRISONS AND THE PRISON SYSTEM, AND REPLACE THEM WITH MORE HUMANE AND EFFECTIVE SYSTEMS. OUR AIM IS TO EXPOSE THE PRISON INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX FOR THE HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATION THAT IT TRULY IS. WE WANT TO CHALLENGE THE IDEA THAT CAGING AND CONTROLLING PEOPLE KEEPS COMMUNITIES SAFE. WE BELIEVE THAT FOR TOO LONG OUR NATION HAS RELIED UPON INCARCERATION AS A WAY TO SOLVE BROADER SOCIAL PROBLEMS, TO ITS DETRIMENT. IN AUGUST OF 2017, WE WILL MARCH ON WASHINGTON TO BRING WORLD ATTENTION TO THE CONTINUED SLAVERY AND INVOLUNTARY SERVITUDE IN AMERICA, ENABLED BY THE 13TH AMENDMENT AND TO HIGHLIGHT THE EVER INCREASING MOVEMENT AGAINST THE PRISON INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX.

## Getting Involved

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The Millions for Prisoners March is a grassroots movement dependent on community investment and local organizing. We urge readers to personally take up this human rights cause by getting involved in a variety of ways including creating flyers, making videos, sharing hashtags such as #Abolishthe13th or #EndPrisonSlavery, as well as sharing Millions for Prisoners Facebook pages in order to raise awareness through social media. These are some small steps individuals can take to inform their community. We also encourage participants to spread their impact by organizing their community to mobilize to Washington D.C. For those who are unable to travel to D.C. we are ask that communities host solidarity demonstrations on the August 19th. This is a grassroots movement so we are truly relying on the people to make this happen. Below is information on how to form a local organizing committee.

### Local Organizing Committee (LOC)

The Local organizing committees shall be comprised of various individuals and organizations situated in local communities throughout the country. The LOCs will provide direct interaction with members of its local community as it relates to the promotion, organization and mobilization for the Millions for Prisoners Human Rights March. The LOC will engage members of the local community, and provide education on the impacts of the 13th amendment of the U.S constitutions and other laws that contribute to mass incarceration in their communities.



### Requirements:

1. Minimum of 3 participants to form a LOC- 1 member being the Local Representative
2. All participants must be in agreement to raise awareness and push the Millions for Prisoner Human Rights March agenda. Participants are responsible for connecting with organizations and recruiting new members



**Submission Info:** In addition to publishing content raising awareness about the march and providing updates on demonstration progress, the No Shackles Newsletter also accepts work from prisoners in the form of articles, art and poetry. This March is about you and some of our most meaningful contributions come from the inside. We also accept submissions from friends and family members of prisoners. For readers interested in submitting their work: typed and printed can be sent to the return address or emailed to <millionsforprisonersmarch@gmail.com>; carbon copy: <amanisawari@gmail.com> Submissions should be marked Attn: No Shackles Newsletter  
Facebook: Millions for Prisoners March on Washington

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#### **Basic Principles for the Treatment of Prisoners**

1. All prisoners shall be treated with the respect due to their inherent dignity and value as human beings.
2. There shall be no discrimination on the grounds of race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.
3. It is, however, desirable to respect the religious beliefs and cultural precepts of the group to which prisoners belong, whenever local conditions so require.
4. The responsibility of prisons for the custody of prisoners and for the protection of society against crime shall be discharged in keeping with a State's other social objectives and its fundamental responsibilities for promoting the well-being and development of all members of society.
5. Except for those limitations that are demonstrably necessitated by the fact of incarceration, all prisoners shall retain the human rights and fundamental freedoms set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and, where the State concerned is a party, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the International Covenant on Civil and

Political Rights and the Optional Protocol thereto, as well as such other rights as are set out in other United Nations covenants.

6. All prisoners shall have the right to take part in cultural activities and education aimed at the full development of the human personality.
7. Efforts addressed to the abolition of solitary confinement as a punishment, or to the restriction of its use, should be undertaken and encouraged.
8. Conditions shall be created enabling prisoners to undertake meaningful remunerated employment which will facilitate their reintegration into the country's labor market and permit them to contribute to their own financial support and to that of their families.
9. Prisoners shall have access to the health services available in the country without discrimination on the grounds of their legal situation.
10. With the participation and help of the community and social institutions, and with due regard to the interests of victims, favorable conditions shall be created for the reintegration of the ex-prisoner into society under the best possible conditions.
11. The above Principles shall be applied impartially.

iamWE Prison Advocacy Network  
P.O. Box 58201  
Raleigh NC 27658

